

Community Relations Teams Spearhead Disaster Outreach

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – Teams of state and federal community-relations specialists are making a concentrated outreach effort in three Gulf Coast counties to provide information about available disaster assistance programs to all Alabamians and displaced evacuees from neighboring states who suffered damages and losses due to Hurricane Katrina.

State Coordinating Officer Bruce Baughman said local emergency management officials and community leaders in Baldwin, Mobile and Washington counties would continue to work closely with the teams to focus aid efforts on any disaster-related needs.

“From the first day a disaster is declared, these specialists connect with all levels of the community including local government, business, religious and volunteer organizations,” Baughman said. “We work together to identify areas of need and then use every available means to let people know that we may be able to help.”

Ron Sherman, federal coordinating officer for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recovery operations, said that the community-relations outreach effort is essential when major storms disrupt normal communications.

“Despite our best efforts, some residents may have unmet needs,” Sherman said. “These specialists build on existing community networks, use local forums and, in many cases, go door-to-door in hard hit neighborhoods to encourage residents to get in touch with us about their losses.”

Anyone with damages should call **800-621-3362 (FEMA)** to register for assistance. Those with a speech- or hearing-impairment can call (TTY) 800-462-7585. The lines are open 24-hours a day, seven days a week until further notice. Internet registration is available at <http://www.fema.gov>.

Individuals and businesses with uninsured loss or damages are eligible for a wide range of FEMA/state disaster recovery programs including grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. Low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration also will be available to cover residential and business losses not compensated by insurance.